Opening Statement

REP. DARLENE HOOLEY (D-OR)

Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Research
U.S. House Committee on Science

HEARING: The International Polar Year – The Scientific Agenda and Federal Role

September 20, 2006

Mr. Chairman, I am pleased to join you in welcoming our witnesses today to this hearing to review the status of planning for the International Polar Year scheduled to begin next March.

This IPY will be the fourth in a series of international, cooperative scientific ventures focused on the polar regions that have occurred over the past 125 years. The last IPY was the International Geophysical Year of 1957-58. It was remarkable in its success in achieving international cooperation and goodwill at the height of the Cold War. It was also significant in laying the groundwork for the development of the Antarctic Treaty system, which has successfully preserved that continent as a sanctuary for scientific research and other peaceful purposes.

The early IPYs were explorations to provide basic information about the most remote and forbidding regions of the globe. As we learned more about the role of the polar regions in affecting such things as global-scale atmospheric and oceanic processes, it has become clear that understanding the physical mechanisms at work at the poles is important to understanding the evolution of global warming. This lends urgency to accelerate the research needed to unlock the secrets that control climate on a global scale.

Research results from the IPY initiative, and from other ongoing polar research, is important to help guide public policy choices surrounding the global warming debate. And of course, increased knowledge and understanding of changes in northern high latitudes is of even greater interest and concern for the people living there.

I am pleased the Subcommittee has the opportunity this morning to hear about the planning process that has been underway for the IPY and about the research and education goals that will be pursued. I would like to better understand what we may hope to achieve at this time from an intensified research effort in polar regions and what legacy we may expect from this IPY.

In addition, I am interested in how the U.S. IPY activities will be integrated within the international program, and how the U.S. agencies that sponsor IPY-related research will coordinate their activities. Since NSF is the lead Federal agency for U.S. participation in the IPY, is a major Federal sponsor of research in polar regions, and fulfills a key role in providing research infrastructure and logistical support, I am happy to welcome Dr. Bement to this morning's hearing.

Also, I would like to take a moment to extend a special greeting to Dr. Kelly Falkner. She is a professor in the College of Oceanic and Atmospheric Sciences at Oregon State University. An inorganic chemist by training, Dr. Falkner applies her expertise to aqueous geochemical problems, such as tracking the fate of river water in the Arctic. She has participated in 24 major seagoing, lake and river expeditions - 7 times as chief scientist.

Dr. Falkner is a graduate of Reed College and received her Ph.D. from the MIT-Woods Hole Joint Program in Oceanography, while holding an NSF Graduate Fellowship. She was the recipient of an Office of Naval Research Young Investigator Award and the NSF Arctic Service Award. She currently serves on the Advisory Committee for NSF's Office of Polar Programs.

Mr. Chairman, I want to thank you for calling this hearing and thank our witnesses for appearing before the Subcommittee today. I look forward to our discussion.